

**Washington, DC** – During House debate of the resolution authorizing the President to go to war in Iraq, Congressman David Price (D-NC) criticized the measure for providing the President with open-ended authority to use force unilaterally and preemptively. He co-sponsored an alternative resolution, which would have bolstered U.N. weapons inspection efforts in Iraq. The following are his remarks in support of the alternative course.

"Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the substitute resolution offered by the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. Spratt) and in opposition to the Hastert-Gephardt resolution.

"The Spratt-Allen-Price-Snyder-Clyburn-Matsui-Larson-Moran-Reyes-Levin resolution recognizes the danger posed by Iraq's possession and development of weapons of mass destruction, and it recognizes the need to enforce United Nations resolutions providing for the destruction of these weapons and of the capacity to produce them.

"It authorizes the President to utilize armed forces to protect and support arms inspectors and to undertake enforcement actions under U.N. auspices. It does not, however, give the President open-ended authorization to use force unilaterally or preemptively. For that he would have to come to Congress for a specific vote after other means had been exhausted.

"As the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. Spratt) has testified, "A second vote is not an imposition on the President's powers. It is the age-old system of checks and balances and one way Congress can say that we prefer for any action against Iraq to have the sanction of the Security Council and the support of a broadbased coalition."

"An up-or-down congressional vote on a resolution authorizing force is a blunt instrument at best. And regardless of which resolution passes, the President and Congress and the country will still face critical decisions down the road. The Iraqi threat, as grave as it is, must be assessed in the context of other antiterrorist and diplomatic objectives. After all, the war against al Qaeda is hardly won. It is critical, as the Spratt resolution states, that action against Iraq not imperil international cooperation in the fight against terrorism or displace related diplomatic endeavors such as pursuit of an Israeli-Palestinian settlement.

"Moreover, a complex of policies is either already in place or is envisioned in the resolutions before us: a regime of coercive inspections; U.N. enforcement of the mandate to disarm; readiness for a devastating response to any aggressive Iraqi military action; no-fly zones; intense surveillance; a tight embargo on strategic and dual-use materials. Could these policies contain, deter, and ultimately disarm Iraq, making a military invasion unnecessary and enabling us to attend to other equally important antiterrorist priorities?

"We cannot answer that question now. But should we not know that answer before we authorize a massive military invasion which surely represents an extreme option?

"We should not make this congressional vote any blunter an instrument than it needs to be. We are being asked to line up behind an open-ended resolution that has been improved by hortatory language but still authorizes the President to invade unilaterally or preemptively under circumstances, weeks or months hence, that we cannot possibly foresee. This, we are told, will help the administration influence the U.N. Security Council and apply maximum pressure on Iraq. Now, that is not a negligible argument; but it does not do justice to our duty, as members of a coordinate branch of government, to help set national policy.

"Our job is to provide a responsible and rational guide to policy, should compliance and enforcement fail. The open-ended resolution requested by the President would represent an abdication of that responsibility.

"The Spratt resolution with its required second vote would give us the means to exercise our constitutional role more fully and with better command of the facts. And, no less than the Hastert-Gephardt resolution, it would serve notice now of our resolve to see United Nations resolutions upheld and Iraq disarmed.

"Our concern about granting open-ended authority to make war should be heightened as we consider the administration's recently enunciated "doctrine" of the right of one country to take preemptive or even preventative military action against hostile states.

"This doctrine goes far beyond the recognized right of anticipatory self-defense.

"A unilateral attack on Iraq would be difficult to justify under existing standards, for even the Bush administration has not consistently argued that the threat to the U.S. from Iraq is imminent. But we must ask how this new doctrine would play out as other nations eagerly adopt it and act on it for their own purposes.

"As former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger recently stated, "It cannot be either in the American national interest or in the world's interest to develop principles that grant every nation an unfettered right of preemption against its own definition of threats to its security."

"Mr. Speaker, the question before us is not whether but how best to address the threats posed by Iraq's weapons programs and its continued defiance of the world community.

"A purely military response, particularly one taken unilaterally or preemptively, would have costs and risks that should lead us to regard it as a last resort. We must deal with the threat in ways that do not compromise our broader war on terrorism and that maintain the support and engagement of our allies.

"The Spratt substitute resolution keeps these priorities straight. It upholds Congress' role in authorizing military operations, not indiscriminately, but under specific conditions for specific purposes. It is vastly preferable to the open-ended Hastert-Gephardt resolution, and I urge its adoption."